

DOINGWHATWORKS



Slideshow

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Examples of Quick Wins

June 2008

Dodge Renaissance Academy, Illinois • August 2008

Edward H. White Career Academy, Illinois • August 2008

Hardy Elementary School, Tennessee • August 2008

Topic: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Practice: Quick Wins

Highlights

- One school had students struggling to master basics in key subjects like reading and math. For a “quick win,” teachers began using flashcards all over the school to help the students practice.
- Another quick win focused on how problems at home were distracting students from learning at school. Teachers began meeting students at their drop-off, and easing them into school with a friendly face and encouraging tone.
- A school that had problems with students wearing provocative or gang clothes chose school uniforms as a quick win—the problem disappeared.

About the Sites

Dodge Renaissance Academy

Chicago, IL

Demographics

99% Black

Examples of Quick Wins

Dodge Renaissance Academy, Illinois , Edward H. White Career Academy, Illinois, and Hardy Elementary School, Tennessee

1% Multiracial

93% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

12% Special Education

The turnaround process in Dodge Elementary included:

- Communicating clear expectations for student behavior and consistently enforcing school policies with carefully spelled out consequences for infractions
- Recruiting teachers who may not be fully developed but are eager to learn and willing to do whatever it takes to help their students learn
- Providing teachers with intensive professional development
- Aligning the curriculum with state standards

Edward H. White Career Academy

Chicago, IL

Demographics

100% Black

90% Free and Reduced-Price Lunch

19% Special Education

The turnaround process at White Career Academy included:

- Communicating clear expectations for focusing on instruction
- Aligning the curriculum with state standards
- Reviewing assessment data to inform instructional practice
- Reassigning staff within the school and providing additional professional development to support instruction at the school site
- Requiring student uniforms to reduce behavioral conflicts with support of teachers and community members

Hardy Elementary School

Chattanooga, TN

Demographics

97% Black

3% White

100% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Several practices helped Hardy Elementary School go from being the worst to the top among the elementary schools in the state of Tennessee:

- A new principal bringing in a new vision and approach
- New teachers
- Targeted professional development to establish a schoolwide set of instructional strategies
- A clearly articulated lesson plan structure
- A balanced literacy program
- Regular use of student assessment data that included monitoring and adjusting instruction based on a careful analysis of data
- New school building
- Clear behavior expectations from all students and school staff

Full Transcript

Presentation Title: Examples of Quick Wins

Which issue a school decides to tackle for a quick win depends on the school and its needs. Turnaround schools often have successful quick wins in areas such as increasing instructional time, improving the facilities, and addressing discipline and behavior problems.

Slide 1: Quick wins

Slide Text: A school that has been failing for years, despite trying all kinds of reforms, needs some proof that it can improve. Quick wins—rapid, dramatic changes in something that has been an entrenched problem—can provide staff the boost they need to invest in turnaround.

Andrew Calkins, Vice President of the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, talks about the place of quick wins in the change process.

Audio: Education and educators tend to focus on the end-state, and historically we haven't put as much thought into the change process. But, that's not true of other sectors, and it's an accepted truism of turnaround everywhere else that the most important thing you can do, practically, is make sure that you have some early wins and that those wins are visible so that people can see the change right away.

Slide 2: Flash cards to drill basics

Slide Text: In one school, students were struggling to master basics in key subjects like reading and math. Teachers began using flashcards all over the school to help the students practice.

Elementary school teacher Lindy Blazek talks about using flash cards across the grades.

Audio: Everybody had flash cards. The lower grades had letter flash cards. The upper grades had word flash cards. There were spelling flash cards, phonetic flash cards, and to get in and out of your room, you flashed a card. If the kid couldn't tell you the answer on the card, he went to the back of the line. If she got it right, she got to go on out to wherever they were headed. And teachers walked around everywhere with things on their neck with flash cards on it, and we did that all the time.

Slide 3: Easing the home-school transition

Slide text: One principal also found that serious problems at home distracted students from their learning at school. Teachers began meeting students at their drop-off, and easing them into school with a friendly face and encouraging tone.

Natalie Elder, principal of Hardy Elementary School, talks about transitioning kids from home to school.

Audio: One thing that we did establish in our building was transitioning kids from home into the school, greeting them at the door, and I don't mean at the front door of the school. I mean at the car door. We will open the door for the parents and say good morning to the parents, and we'll tell them, "Let us have your babies for a minute so we can enrich them." And I've asked all teachers, "always smile at parents, let them know when they drop their kids off, they are so precious even to us." I wanted the students to understand once you leave home, everything here is about educating you, and we are going to start it from the minute you walk in the door, and they enjoy that.

Slide 4: Self-control in the hallways

Slide text: Students in one school were getting into scuffles in the halls. The principal instituted a way of walking through the halls that helped the students keep their hands to themselves. The whole school then gathered in the multi-purpose room for morning assembly. The assembly activities turned students' attention to learning.

Natalie Elder, principal of Hardy Elementary School, talks about changing hallway behavior.

Audio: We travel, and I call it travel when we are moving through the halls. We are traveling, and the kids like that. And we fold our arms like this in a traveling position, and that means that they are keeping their

Dodge Renaissance Academy, Illinois , Edward H. White Career Academy, Illinois, and Hardy Elementary School, Tennessee

hands and their arms to themselves. That's to keep kids from saying, "She touched me, she kicked me, she bumped into me." And in the hall they have to learn. We have what you call color blocks and the blocks—they know there is a certain color we have to stand on. So we have beige blocks; we have brown blocks; we have burgundy, but they have to stand on the brown block because what we found out: each brown block, there is a space between it. So that leaves enough room where no one is touching. Because sometimes kids become very reactive, and just to counteract that that gives them, again, ownership to what we want from them. So they travel, and some people have issues with it, saying that when we are moving through the halls, the kids look like soldiers. But they missed the concept. The concept, again, is about organization. It's about structure, and it's about being with yourself and doing the right thing because we have to teach kids to do the right thing. When you go out into society as an adult, when you bump into a person as you move through the streets, you can't turn around and punch them and hit them. So we have to teach them how to do the same thing in school. You have to learn to control; that's called self-control.

Slide 5: Uniforms

Slide text: Another school had many disciplinary referrals stemming from students wearing provocative or gang clothes. The principal required students to wear uniforms, and the problem disappeared.

Lynn Garner, principal of White Elementary School, talks about the impact of school uniforms on her school.

Audio: Prior to me coming to White, children did not wear uniforms, and that presented an issue in and of itself. A lot of time we spent trying to diffuse different arguments amongst children about who had on what. And some people may say that is not important, but for schools that are really having difficulty with children and academic achievement, that is a form of structure. And it allows everybody to be treated the same way, and the same expectations are for all children. And so even though it was very small, it had a large impact. Now children are not concerned about what you have on, but we are more concerned about learning and academic achievement, and so that sent a very strong message. It also decreased the number of discipline referrals I had.